A

LETTER

TO THE

REVEREND JOHN MARTIN.

OCCASIONED BY

HIS *INTENDED* SPEECH

ON THE

REPEAL

OF THE

TEST AND CORPORATION ACTS.

See Meredith, Rev
vol 2. p. 239

BY *no Reverend* DISSENTER.

'Tis LIBERTY alone that gives the flow'r
Of fleeting life it's luſtre and perfume,
And we are *weeds* without it. COWPER.

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REVEREND JOHN MARTIN.

Rec'd Dec 18, 1843
The Rev'd Mess Mrs Clarke.
Newton

HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY

ON THE

REPEAL

OF THE

TEST AND CORPORATION ACTS.

BY A PROTESTANT DISSENTER.

LONDON:

A

LETTER

TO THE

REVEREND JOHN MARTIN.

REVEREND SIR,

I Have attentively read the Speech which you "*intended* to have delivered before the general "body of Diſſenting Miniſters, at the Library in Red "Croſs Street, December 22, 1789*:" and I now ſit

* It may be *queſtioned*, Whether the Speech, as it is *now* printed, is exactly *that* which Mr. M. *intended* to have delivered? There are parts which *ſeem* to have been the produce of *after-thought*, and which bear a diſtant reference to what paſſed in Red Croſs Street. See particularly Page 9, line 1—7. and Page 15, line 15, to line 15 of Page 16: To theſe may be added the circumſtance of having *delayed* the publication more than *two months after the time* it was "*intended* to have been delivered," when it muſt have been ſuppoſed to have been compleat.

down to ſubmit a few thoughts which the peruſal of that Speech naturally ſuggeſted. I do this with the more freedom, becauſe you have not only rendered every apology unneceſſary, by declaring that you are "not alarmed at the proſpect of oppoſition;" but you ſeem alſo, by ſuch a declaration, to conſider yourſelf beyond the reach of the moſt formidable opponent.

As a Diſſenter, and poſſeſſing ſome knowledge of your character, I confeſs "I am *not alarmed* at the "oppoſition" which *you* make to the claims of reaſon and juſtice; nor does your Speech contain any thing *alarming* to the *civil rights* of my brethren: the affected obſcurity with which it abounds, the ſervile principles which you endeavour to eſtabliſh, and the ſpirit which pervades the whole, are exactly ſuch as might have been expected. I am, therefore, induced to this Addreſs, partly becauſe nobody elſe has thought it worth while publicly to notice you, and partly to convince your admirers that, in whatever degree of eſtimation *they* may hold your performance, it is not on *that* account unanſwerable.

I forbear to remark on the difference between what really *was* ſaid, and what you now affirm you "*intended* to have delivered." It muſt have been ſufficiently mortifying to a gentleman of your *deciſive*

tone

tone to be "properly called to order," in ſo grave an aſſembly, and to receive that correction which was there thought to be due to the language you had uſed: but how much more painful to *feel* that it was merited! for it is, I think, a clear proof of conſcious impropriety, that you publiſh what you *intended* to have ſaid, rather than what you actually *did* ſay. I ſhall leave you, under ſo humiliating a circumſtance, to the conſolation you may derive from reflecting on the *complimentary letters* of *Biſhops*, and the *modeſt* approbation of a *Maid* of *Honour**.

Aſſuming the fact that *two Biſhops* and a *Maid* of *Honour* have expreſſed approbation of your Speech, it may be proper to enquire *what part* of it they could poſſibly approve? It does not ſeem conſiſtent that

* Mr. M. was ſo extravagantly *elated* by theſe communications, that he could not refrain from making them known even to the *Old Women* of his Meeting! Whether *theſe* are the perſons deſcribed in p. 25 of his Speech as "the *beſt* and "*wiſeſt* of his acquaintance," or whether the *Biſhops* and the *Maid* of *Honour* were aware of the *uſe* which Mr. M. would make of their favours, it is of no conſequence to determine: the *fact* remains indiſputably *true*. There ſeems, therefore, a little *inconſiſtency*, when Mr. M. ſays, p. 3, "I am not induced to ſpeak in hope of *applauſe*." He certainly could not *expect* applauſe at the Library. But *why* print? Why *teaze* Sir R. Hill to *preſent* the Speech to the MINISTER?

the

the Biſhops, as *holy men of God*, ſhould applaud the *ſpirit* which it breathes: they can never be ſuppoſed to countenance MISREPRESENTATION and *undeſerved* CENSURE. Nor could the Biſhops, as *Scholars*, and men of *literary talents*, avow approbation of your Speech on account of it's COMPOSITION; for *that*, in the opinion of good judges, is materially defective: they ſay your ſtyle is *affected*, *inelegant*, *ungrammatical*, and in ſome places *nonſenſical**. As little can

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* It would be eaſy to ſubſtantiate theſe aſſertions by *numerous quotations* from the Speech. At the very outſet, Mr. M. expreſſes himſelf thus: "*Could* I ſuppoſe my opinion "*will* be approved, *it* would give me pleaſure; but I am "too well acquainted with the ſentiments of this Society, "to *flatter myſelf with ſucceſs*." p. 3. But the *inaccuracies* are too flagrant to eſcape detection: I will produce only inſtances of *miſrepreſentation* and *undeſerved cenſure*. P. 4, line 5, "I find, Sir, *they* have reſolved"——They! Who? Mr. M. ſays generally, "our brethren in the country:" whereas the fact is, that *ſome* only have come to the reſolution which he quotes. P. 7, line 21, "It is *ſaid* our bre-"thren have a *natural right* to places of truſt in *every* de-"partment of government."——*Who* has ſaid this? *Nobody* beſide Mr. M. P. 8, line 7, "They ſend up *petitions* "to parliament." There have been *no* petitions: and, if there had, they would not have implied "*ſubmiſſion*," in the ſenſe in which Mr. M. has uſed the term. P. 15, line 22, "*Diſcuſſion* is deemed *improper*." *Where?* and by *whom?*

Mr.

can they be conceived to approve of your general position, that the REPEAL of the *Corporation* and *Teſt Acts* would be *injurious* to the Diſſenters; for this their public conduct flatly contradicts. If the Biſhops were of opinion that the Repeal would be *dangerous* to the Diſſenters, in the view in which you place it, is it to be imagined they would have *reſiſted* an ap-

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Mr. M. would *inſinuate*, in the *Society* of *London Miniſters* "of the three denominations:" but who will give it *credit*? P. 28, line 11, the conduct of the Diſſenting Miniſters is reſolved into this queſtion—"Whether their *temporal* ad-"vantages are to be preferred to their *religious reputation*?" This will readily be admitted to be an *unfair* ſtatement. P. 6, line 13, "If our brethren who are not in the miniſtry "have *ſet their affections on theſe things*——" This is an *unwarrantable perverſion* of Scripture, originally *deſcriptive* of the *ungodly*. Line 18, "It is *affecting* to behold with what "*eagerneſs* the invitation is accepted." Intended as a *rebuke* to thoſe *Miniſters* who have taken an active part with their brethren *not* in the miniſtry. P. 19, at the bottom—"I wiſh *we* [Miniſters] may not be *buſy bodies in other* "*men's matters*. To avoid that *odious imputation*, let us "conſider whether the Aſſociations which have been formed "are either conſiſtent, prudent, or expedient." This is *curious*. To ſay nothing of the *cenſure* indirectly conveyed, the *Miniſters* are exhorted to "conſider *minutely* the ten-"dency of aſſociations formed by *others*, in order to "AVOID the odious imputation of being *buſy bodies in* "*other men's matters*."

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plication ſo circumſtanced? So far from it, they muſt moſt heartily have joined in it; and, inſtead of *thanking* Mr. Pitt for ſupporting the Church, they would, upon your principles, have found themſelves *obliged* to Mr. Fox for aiming at the future ſecurity of the Eſtabliſhment, by the *deſtruction* of Diſſenters: but the truth is, they do *not* think ſo.

The *only point*, therefore, in which the Biſhops *can* agree with you, (if indeed they agree in *any* thing *beſide* your *oppoſition* to the civil rights of mankind) *muſt* be on the ſubject of a *total* "Repeal of penal "Statutes" reſpecting Religion. Of theſe Statutes you expreſs yourſelf thus: "If by a repeal of all "penal Statutes in matters of religion, *every man*, "who is conſcientious in his diſſent, may *reap the* "*advantage*, no perſon *more cordially wiſhes* for ſuch "a repeal than myſelf. In ſoliciting *ſuch* relief, we "ſhould act in character; and, I believe, we ſhould "be *heard* with *liberal attention**." Now this is the *only thing* remaining in your Speech, of *which*, if the "RIGHT REVEREND FATHERS" do *not* approve, they approve of *nothing*. But they have *thanked* you: it muſt *then* be inferred, that they "*concur*" with you in "*cordially wiſhing* for a repeal of *all penal Statutes* "in matters of religion;" and in proclaiming to the

* Mr. M. p. 5.

world,

world, that whenever "*ſuch* relief is ſolicited," it will be regarded "with LIBERAL ATTENTION."

In addition to ſo pleaſing a circumſtance, you mention, with a degree of confidence, "the *diſpoſition* "of the King," as being favourable to your wiſhes. It would appear invidious to enquire, through what *medium* you became acquainted with ſo *important* a piece of information? Whether by a *perſonal interview*, or by *private* intelligence from a *Maid* of Honour, is of no conſequence; the *fact* remains the *ſame:* and every Diſſenter muſt feel great pleaſure in being *aſſured* of it from ſo *reſpectable* a quarter. I congratulate my brethren, therefore, on this *noble* and *glorious* acquiſition. Notwithſtanding the preſent unfavourable appearances, ſo far as our *civil* rights are concerned; notwithſtanding the *oppoſition* to thoſe rights by a *Diſſenting* Miniſter; there is yet hope: Mr. Martin, the King, the Maid of Honour, and the two Biſhops, are "for the *repeal* of ALL *penal* "*ſtatutes* in matters of religion!!!"—But I muſt turn from ſo inviting a proſpect, to contemplate Mr. Martin in a *leſs favourable* light; and where, even with the countenance of thoſe auguſt perſonages, he ſinks in the eſtimation of every friend to liberty and the rights of mankind.

The Reſolution of the country Diſſenters on which you have choſen to animadvert, is the following—

" That it is their duty to petition the Legiſlature " in a body for redreſs of their grievances; and to " continue their applications until their civil rights " *be reſtored*, and until all *penal ſtatutes* in matters of " religion be repealed."

" From *this* reſolution," *you* ſay, " it appears our " brethren have two things in view—*civil rights*, and " *matters* of *religion*." This inference is not *ſtrictly juſt:* to *me*, their " *views* appear" to be a *reſtoration* to civil rights, and a " *repeal* of all *penal ſtatutes* in " matters of religion." If you had kept *this* in view, or had not purpoſely concealed it, much of what you have written might have been ſpared. That *ſage* remark, indeed, " What they *have* they need not *ſeek*," would not have been leſs *abſurd*, nor more *inapplicable*, than at preſent; but it might have prevented the implication, that to " *have*" a claim to civil rights, unjuſtly with-held, is ſufficient, without " *ſeeking*" their reſtitution; or that, to " *ſeek*" their reſtitution, ſuppoſes the abſence of every well-founded claim. It would alſo have prevented you from confounding " *civil* rights" with " *natural* rights;" a reſolution " to *petition* the Legiſlature that their civil rights *be* " *reſtored*," with a " *wiſh* to procure *a declaration*

" of

" of their rights;" and the application as *Citizens*, with their *religious character* as Diſſenters.

Under the ſame miſtaken principle, you " *queſtion* " whether articles ſo *diſtinct* as civil rights and mat- " ters of religion *ſhould* be *united?*" Becauſe civil rights, from their nature, cannot be ſubſtituted in *aid* of religion, you would endeavour to perſuade us to relinquiſh every idea of *aſſerting* them. While you object to the union of civil rights *with* matters of religion, you would urge the nature of religion *againſt* civil rights, and make *it* the engine, if not of ſpiritual, at leaſt of *civil*, tyranny and perſecution. This is to " *wake* that jealouſy which ſeldom *ſlumbers*, " and rouſe that *temper* it cannot be *your* credit to " provoke *."

There is alſo ſomething very ſingular in the *manner* in which you expreſs yourſelf—" I WISH *to prove* " that civil rights are not likely to be of any ſervice " to religion." I have no doubt but the *proſpect* of being able to do it, afforded much pleaſure to your *exalted* mind: the bare *wiſh* muſt approve itſelf to every *liberal* and *generous* ſoul; for who can ſuſpect

* Mr. M. p. 5. " By the way, there is little danger of " *waking* jealouſy, which ſeldom *ſlumbers*." Mr. M. muſt think it *ſleeps* now, or he would not be afraid of *waking* it.

either it's *ſincerity* or *extent?* Like another HANNIBAL, you have ſworn *perpetual enmity* to *civil rights*, and your *abilities* are devoted to *their deſtruction:* but, alas! Sir, "our *Reaſon*, when ſhe makes the "*diſpoſitions of men* her ſubject, often labours to *little* "*purpoſe.*"

You "wiſh to prove that civil rights are not likely "to be of any *ſervice* to RELIGION." If, by this, you refer to their inability to afford any *new evidence* of it's truth or divinity—this, perhaps, will be readily acknowledged; but if, by the aſſertion, you mean to imply that civil rights are not ſerviceable by giving religion *full ſcope* in the world, and by leaving men to follow it's dictates, without the *hope* or *fear* of temporal rewards or puniſhments—to this, I ſhould think, no reaſonable man will ſubſcribe. You "believe that religion is a *perſonal* concern;" and admit that "civil government is *not* inconſiſtent with "the *pureſt* ſchemes of Chriſtianity." *If* religion be of "*perſonal concern*," that conſideration muſt involve an *individual right* to *examination*; but, if civil rights are *with-held* in conſequence of the *reſult* of ſuch an examination, religion, as a *perſonal concern*, is *then*, and then *only*, injured and inſulted—injured, *not* in the enjoyment, but by the *violation* of civil rights. By the ſame rule, if "*civil government*" be

"not

" not inconſiſtent with the *pureſt ſchemes of Chriſti-*
" *anity*," the *enjoyment* of *civil rights*—which are of the *eſſence* of civil government—*cannot* be conſidered as *inimical* to religion.

In one view, a *compleat* enjoyment of civil rights muſt be *advantageous* to religion; becauſe *that* would demand a *repeal* of the SACRAMENTAL TEST. That the Sacramental Teſt is a *profanation* of a *religious inſtitution*, you will not, I hope, deny: this being admitted, it will follow that religion is, thereby, *diſgraced*; it's *importance* proportionably *diminiſhed*; and that AUTHORITY which enjoined—" *Do this in re-*
" *membrance of* ME," *ſlighted* and *deſpiſed*.

If it ſhould be even admitted, that " civil rights
" are *not* likely to be of *ſervice* to religion," it does not follow that *therefore* they are *dangerous*; or that religion will have *leſs influence* in the world. " If the
" *foundations of all religion and morality* COULD have
" been rooted up, an *arbitrary eſtabliſhment* in the
" *wanton exerciſe* of an unreſiſted power would have
" left little of them but the *name*: for to drive men
" from the exerciſe of the right of private judg-
" ment; to *tempt* and terrify them into *diſſimulation*
" and hypocriſy; to *interpoſe* a *ſecular authority* be-
" tween *them* and their *perſuaſion* of the will of their
" CREATOR; is the *neareſt* of any *practicable* expe-
" dient

" dient to the production of this portentous effect.
" But it *cannot be:*—the principles of religion and
" morality *will* break forth in human ſociety, where-
" ever there is any room for the exerciſe of ſympa-
" thy and of reflection: and where the Goſpel is in
" any degree *known*, beneficence, the veneration of
" Infinite Goodneſs, and a conduct in ſome degree
" conformable to the hope of immortality, announced
" by a divine miſſion, and confirmed by the reſur-
" rection of CHRIST, will diffuſe a ſalutary influence;
" neither loſt amidſt the variance of ſects, nor cruſh-
" ed by the enormous preſſure of any eſtabliſh-
" ment*."

If we ſhould enquire, *What* religion is likely *not* to be *benefited* by civil rights? you might very conſiſtently anſwer, Religion, as *you* underſtand it: but then I have your authority to add, that " *human* " *underſtanding* is *no where* in a ſtate of perfection; it " is ſo *ſtained* with *prejudice*, ſo *diſtorted* by *partiality*, " and ſo *corrupted* by *venal purſuits*, that reaſon and " ſophiſtry, argument and paſſion, are frequently " confounded:" of courſe, " the notion of a living " *infallible* judge†" is greatly erroneous. But if

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* CAPEL LOFFT.

† Mr. Martin's Speech, p. 10.

you

you intend religion as it exists in the BIBLE, why then, I should think the *universal enjoyment* of civil rights necessary to form a *pure* and *uncorrupted* opinion of it. Let it be remembered, that the *same principle* which denies to *one good subject* the rights of Citizenship, on account of his *religious opinions*, will equally deny them to *every* good subject; to the Churchman no less than the Dissenter: and though *you* may not "have the highest expectation from "*freedom* of *thought* and *speech*," yet this freedom is abridged, and religion dishonoured, whenever the *religious sentiments* of men are, either directly or indirectly, controuled by the civil power.

"What Charles the Second *unfaithfully* promised, "at Breda, (you say) we *may* ask with honour*." But is this any thing *less* than what civil rights *include?* King Charles promised that "*no man* should "be *disquieted*, or *called* in *question*, for *differences* in "*opinion* in matters of religion." It will not admit of a doubt, but that those who are *deprived* of their *civil rights* by the operation of the *Test Laws*, ARE "called in *question* for *differences* in *opinion* in mat-"ters of *religion*." The sentiment, therefore, which

* Speech, p. 7.

you

you have ſelected from an "highly applauded ſpeech,* how much ſoever it may have "*hurt your feelings*," remains in *full force*, viz. "that the *pretended toleration* of Diſſenters is a *real perſecution**." Mr. Beaufoy, whoſe "*evidence*" you conſider as "*in-*"*vincible*," ſhall eſtabliſh this point. His Speech, in the late Debate on the repeal of the Teſt Act, has

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* Contraſt the grovelling ſentiments of Mr. M. an *Engliſh Diſſenting* Miniſter, with thoſe of a *French* Proteſtant Clergyman, on the ſubject of TOLERATION, and it will indeed appear as if Frenchmen were "formed, not to *copy*, "but to *give* EXAMPLES." *Monſieur* RABAUT *De Saint Etienne* addreſſed the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY in the following glowing terms: "Gentlemen, it is not even *Toleration* "that I claim; ſt is LIBERTY. *Toleration! Sufferance! "Pardon! Clemency!* Ideas *ſupremely unjuſt* in regard to "Diſſidents, as long as it remains true that difference of "religion, the difference of opinion, is *not* a *crime*. TOLE-"RATION! I demand that itſelf be proſcribed in it's turn, "and it *ſhall* be; this *unjuſt word*, which repreſents thoſe, "whom often hazard and education have led into a habit of "thinking different from ours, as citizens deſerving *pity*, "or *guilty men* whom it may be *prudent* to *forgive*. Ah! "Gentlemen, in this partition of *errors* and *truths* which "men divide, debate, and diſpute among themſelves, *who* is "he that will venture to aſſure himſelf, that he is *never* "miſtaken; that *Truth* is conſtantly with *him*, and Error as "conſtantly with *other men*?"

the

the following juſt ſentiments: " It is the ſevereſt af-
" fliction, of which the Diſſenters complain, that
" while, in order to enjoy that right of private
" belief, which is eſſential to thought, and there-
" fore inſeparable from exiſtence, they are reduced
" to a ſituation which the Houſe of Peers * have ſo-
" lemnly pronounced *to be one of the moſt unhappy to*
" *which Engliſhmen can be reduced*, they are conſider-
" ed by their fellow-ſubjects as enjoying a *ſufficient*
" and *ample toleration*. You aſk from the Legiſla-
" ture the free exerciſe of private judgment in queſ-
" tions of religion: you claim the right of acced-
" ing to thoſe laws, by which the ALMIGHTY *go-*
" *verns conviction*; a right which, if it were in your
" inclination, it is not in your *power*, to *reſign*; yet
" *that very right* you ſhall enjoy on *no other* condi-
" tion than that of being *excluded* from *all* the *offices*
" and *honours* of the ſtate; of being denied the *com-*
" *mon* privilege of bearing arms; and of being in-
" volved in *penalties* which the Houſe of Peers have
" declared *never*, except for offences the *moſt enor-*
" *mous*, ought to be inflicted. Yet *this toleration*
" ſhall be held to be *ſufficient* and *compleat!* Have
" your fellow-citizens raiſed you to the ſeat of Magi-

* On the *occaſional Conformity Bill* of Queen Anne. Chand. Deb. p. 220, 225.

" ſtracy as a man whoſe *integrity* and *talents* invite
" the confidence of the innocent, and appal the hopes
" of the guilty; have they entruſted you with the
" management of their affairs, as a perſon whoſe
" *probity* they have often tried, and whoſe *judgment*
" they have repeatedly proved: that toleration which
" *is granted*, ſhall *depoſe* you from your office as a
" man *unworthy of all truſt*; for whoſe conduct the
" *ſtrongeſt oaths* are a *weak* and *inſufficient ſecurity*.
" Yet your *fellow-citizens* ſhall exult in the *liberality*
" of the *indulgence* which they have extended to your
" *character* and *religious opinions!* The very privileges
" which you derive from your benevolence to the
" poor, this *compleat* and *ſufficient* toleration ſhall
" *wreſt from your hands!* Have you endowed an
" hoſpital, and obtained a charter for it's eſtabliſh-
" ment; all *ſhare* in the *management* of it's funds,
" which you yourſelf have created; all means of
" conducting to it's appropriated ends the money
" which yourſelf have given, ſhall be *taken entirely*
" *away!* You ſhall not be Governor of your own
" Charity, nor a Director of your own Inſtitution:
" YET THE TOLERATION WHICH DEPRIVES YOU OF
" ALL THESE RIGHTS, SHALL BE DEEMED SUFFICI-
" ENT AND COMPLEAT*!"

Thus you ſee, Sir, that " *toleration* and *perſecu-*

* Woodfall's Diary, March 3, 1790.

" *tion*"

" *tion*" not only " *may*," but actually DO, " exiſt " at the ſame time*." Mr. TOWGOOD, whom you have ſo largely quoted, ſeems to be of the ſame opinion: " I think the Teſt Law is a *moſt unrighteous* " *reſtraint*, and an undoubted *violation* of our *natural* " *rights*†." Where, then, is the " *impolicy*," or the " *injuſtice*," of aſſerting, " that the pretended tole- " ration of Diſſenters is a *real perſecution*?" If it be a reflection on the " ACT of TOLERATION," to ſay that it *does not ſecure* to Diſſenters their *civil rights*, it is no more than *truth* demands: for, even with all it's amendments " in our favour," it falls far ſhort of what " WILLIAM the THIRD‡" recommended to his firſt Parliament. " *I hope*," ſaid his Majeſty, " *you will leave room for the admiſſion of* " *all Proteſtants that are able and willing to ſerve.*" With equal inconſiſtency you have preſſed the authority of Mr. TOPLADY into your ſervice§: that eminently great man diſdained to countenance your maxims of civil policy. The Sermon‖ to which you have referred, is replete with juſt principles of liberty; and the following paſſage is a ſhort but beautiful reply to your whole ſpeech—" The *ſpirit* and *pri-* " *vileges* of the Engliſh Conſtitution are analogous " to the vital fluids in an animal body, which *ought*,

* Mr. M.'s Speech, p. 11. † p. 12. ‡ p. 13. § p. 23.
‖ Faſt Sermon,

" by a *liberal* and *impartial circulation*, to warm and " invigorate, not only the head and heart, but the " meaneſt and remoteſt limb." He was not merely of opinion that " every ſpecies of *poſitive penalty*, " for different modes of faith and worſhip," was not to be endured, as you would ſeem to imply; but he manfully declared, that Diſſenters of all deſcriptions ſhould " enjoy *every* ADVANTAGE of *Civil* So- " ciety*." But this is a ſentiment which to *you* will not " exhibit a *pleaſing picture* of the human mind."

I entirely fall in with the idea, that a repeal of the Teſt Laws will *gradually annihilate* the power of the Diſſenters as a *body*; they will, by degrees, ceaſe " to " form a *ſeparate claſs*," and no longer " conſtitute a " *diſtinct intereſt* in the COMMUNITY." Now, whatever *danger* you may apprehend to religion from ſuch a circumſtance, I confeſs I ſhould not regret *ſuch* " a weakneſs of union:" it is an event, I think, moſt devoutly to be wiſhed. For what good purpoſe can it anſwer, either to religion or civil ſociety, to preſerve *diſtinctions* in the *Community*, which generate *diſunion*, and keep alive a ſpirit of *perſecution*? Mr. Beauſoy has placed the conſequences of a repeal in their true light—" As MEN who value their *rights*, " as CITIZENS *indignant* of *oppreſſion*, the BENEFIT " to Diſſenters from the repeal will indeed be

* Free Thoughts.

" GREAT."

" GREAT *." The queſtion, therefore, is, Whether the *undoubted rights* of *men* and *citizens* are not to be *preferred* to any *power* or *conſequence* in the Community, which the Diſſenters at *preſent* poſſeſs? This queſtion, Sir, the Diſſenters, as a body, *have decided*. Their application to Parliament for a repeal is *not* founded on their " *religious reputation*," as you have falſely ſuppoſed; for that would be *abſurd*: and you might, with propriety, ſay to *ſuch* petitioners, " *Ye* " *know not what ye aſk*." If their being Diſſenters *entitled* them to the rights of citizenſhip, *Conformiſts* muſt be *excluded*: but the claims of *both* reſt preciſely on the *ſame* grounds—on the broad baſis of *general* and *impartial freedom*. If any thing may be drawn from your aſſertion, " that on *religious ſubjects* WE " are greatly divided; that CHURCHMEN are *as* di- " vided as ourſelves; and that theſe " diſputes have " prevailed in *all ages*, and *yet prevail* in *every* " *country* †:" it muſt be the JUSTICE and the POLICY of leaving " theſe *diſputes*" to take their own courſe, unaided and uncorrupted by the *civil* MAGISTRATE. On this principle, *Diſſenters* do not *forfeit* their civil rights, neither do the *Members* of the *Eſtabliſhment* acquire a " *ſuperior*" claim: both the one and the other, as MEN and as CITIZENS, ought to participate the

* Mr. M. p. 21. † Mr. M. p. 10.

ſame

ſame civil privileges, and enjoy the ſame common advantages.

In your zeal "to *prove* that CIVIL RIGHTS are "not likely to be of any ſervice to religion," you ſeem to queſtion their *very exiſtence:* not, indeed, by a *direct* and "*unequivocal* explanation"—for *that* muſt have defeated your purpoſe—but with what Dr. Johnſon terms "*artful perplexity*;" a ſort of language from which nothing clear may be inferred, and which involves the whole in a moſt *affected* MYSTERY. "Civil right is a ſubject of *delicate* and "of *deep* diſcuſſion. It is not only a right which "*bad* men may poſſeſs; but a right which *they*, who "have nothing greater in view, are more anxious "to ſeize than men who lay hold on eternal life*." But wherein conſiſts either the *delicacy* or the *depth* of the diſcuſſion? "It is a right, you ſay, which *bad* "men *may* poſſeſs;" and "which *thoſe*, who have "*nothing greater* in view, are *anxious* to *ſeize*." According to this ſtatement, nothing more happens to "civil right," than happens to any other right, or to the world in general: you may ſee many perſons "more anxious to ſeize WEALTH than to lay hold "on eternal life." Is *that* a reaſon why wealth ſhould *not* be purſued? Would you be ſo infatuated, as to expect that a great *trading nation* ſhould relinquiſh

* Mr. M. p. 7.

the

the objects of *commerce*, merely because *some* of her merchants might be "*bad* men," and others *entirely devoted* to trading purſuits? Neither will you find, Sir, that a *great* and *enlightened* body of men, like the Proteſtant Diſſenters, are to be *deterred* from aſſerting their civil rights, either by the "*depth* or "*delicacy* of the *diſcuſſion*;" much leſs becauſe "*bad* "men may" be intereſted in the acquiſition, and others diſcover greater anxiety for their poſſeſſion than is perhaps to be juſtified.

"Liberty and Right are terms *difficult* to be *de-* "*fined**." The "*difficulty*" ſeems to be confined to *your* miſtaken *views* of the ſubject; which, indeed, render a definition almoſt impoſſible. But is there any "difficulty" either in the *meaning* or *application* of the following ſentiments of the celebrated *French Proteſtant* before quoted†? "LIBERTY is a *common* "*benefit*, and *all citizens* have an *equal right* to it. "Liberty ought, then, to *appertain* to all. Either "*all* have a right to it, or *no one* hath: he who diſ- "tributes it *unequally* doth not know *what it is*; he "who *attacks*, in *any manner*, the liberty of *another*, "attacks his *own*, and deſerves to *loſe it* in his turn; "becauſe he is *unworthy* of a bleſſing of which he "doth *not* know the value." One curious reaſon

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* Mr. M. p. 13. † *Monſieur* RABAUT *De Saint Etienne.*

why

why you think "Liberty and right are terms "*difficult* to be defined," is, becauſe "the *boundaries* "of thoſe bleſſings, like the boundaries of a pariſh, "have frequently occaſioned *warm diſputes* *." But can you ſeriouſly think *this* an objection to their being *aſcertained* and *determined?* If the *warmth* attending a diſpute is an argument againſt it's continuance, it applies equally to thoſe who *reſiſt* as to thoſe who *contend*; and there is juſt as much reaſon that the *former* ſhould *yield*, as that the latter *ought* to *ſubmit*. "The boundaries" of *civil* and *ſocial* life "frequently occaſion *warm* diſputes:" but can that be urged as a plea for *levelling all diſtinctions*, and leaving *private property* and *perſonal liberty* open to *every invader?* You are averſe to the "*diſcuſſion* of "civil liberty and right," becauſe "they who *con-* "*tend* for ſuch poſſeſſions are in *danger* of running "to *exceſs* †." If this were to be admitted as of ſufficient force to ſet aſide ſuch contentions, it would apply to "*diſcuſſions*" of every *other* kind, *religious ones* themſelves not excepted. The "*danger* of "running to *exceſs*" muſt have forbid even *your* efforts to obſtruct "the endleſs conteſt for civil "rights;" and then the world would have loſt a

* Mr. M. p. 13.

† Mr. M. probably refers to his *own conduct* at the Library.

literary

literary curioſity, and yourſelf thoſe *gratuities* which common report ſays you have received.

In order to prove that "Liberty and Right," as applied to the *claims* of the *Diſſenters*, "are terms "difficult to be explained," you confound a *ſtate of Nature* with a ſtate of *Society*; and, under this miſtaken notion, obſerve, "a *natural* right to *civil* poſ-"ſeſſions may be diſputed*." Under the ſame miſtaken principle we are preſented with ſeveral caſes which to me, Sir, do not appear to bear the leaſt analogy. The firſt reſpects the "*Freedom* of the *City* "of *London*." You would have us believe that, becauſe this privilege *cannot* be obtained but by "birth, "ſervice, purchaſe, or favour†," *therefore* Diſſenters have *no claim* upon *Parliament* for a repeal of the Teſt laws. But, Sir, this caſe, to be applicable, ſhould involve the *religious character* of every freeman, by excluding *all* from the privileges of the city, *except*

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* "A *natural* right to *civil* poſſeſſions;" agreeable to p. 7. "It is *ſaid*, our brethren have a *natural* right to *places* of "*truſt* in every department of *civil* government." Now it is *denied* that *any* of "our brethren," *except* Mr. M. *have* ſaid this in any *public reſolution* whatever. Mr. M. therefore, ſtands accuſed of having *manufactured* it purpoſely for the occaſion: like children, he chalks fancied figures upon the wainſcot, only to enjoy the pleaſure of battering them with his knuckles!

† Mr. M. p. 14.

thoſe of a *certain perſuaſion* in matters of religion. *This* it does *not*; it is purely a *civil* regulation, and *may* be acquired by *any man* without the ſacrifice of a *ſingle religious ſcruple*.

As much may be ſaid of "the right of voting for "Members to ſit in Parliament*." Whatever may be the inequalities attending the repreſentation of the people, there are *no excluſions* of Proteſtant Diſſenters on the ground of *religion*; and if any thing is to be inferred from the facts you have ſtated, it muſt be the *juſtice* and *neceſſity* of a *reviſion* of thoſe laws, by which "a man who has a *freehold* of forty ſhillings a "year, has a *legal* vote; while men of much greater "property, held by a *different tenure*, are *deprived* of "*that privilege*." You very juſtly remark, "*Reaſon* "would *correct* theſe *abuſes* †;" but is it not a little ſtrange to produce "ABUSES," which *ought* to be *corrected*, as reaſons *why* your brethren are to be reſtrained in the enjoyment of their civil rights?

There is alſo this farther *difference* to be obſerved. You may aſſume the privileges of a freeman of London, or obtrude yourſelf at an election as a qualified elector, and ſuſtain little or no inconvenience from

* Mr. M. p. 18.

† Page 19. Mr. M. may mean to "*correct* theſe abuſes," by *taking away* the *right* of election altogether. This would be CONSISTENT, to be ſure!

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the effects of the law in ſuch caſes: but the *diſabilities* liable to be incurred under the *Teſt Act* are cruel in the extreme. "All perſons executing any office or "offices, civil or military, and who do or ſhall *neglect* "or *refuſe* to take the ſaid oaths and *Sacrament*, and "being lawfully convicted in any of the courts of "Weſtminſter, or at the aſſizes, *ſhall be diſabled* "from *thenceforth* to *ſue* or *uſe* any *action*, *bill*, *plaint*, "or *information*, in courſe of law; or to *proſecute* "any ſuit in *any court* of *equity*, or to be *guardian* of "*any child*, or *executor* or *adminiſtrator* of any per-"ſon, or *capable* of any *legacy* or *deed* of *gift*, or to "*bear any office* within this realm of England, domi-"nion of Wales, or town of Berwick upon Tweed; "*and* ſhall *forfeit* the ſum of FIVE HUNDRED *Pounds*, "to be recovered by him or them who ſhall ſue for "the ſame*."

In adverting to the "*Society of Miniſters* of the "three denominations," meeting at the Library,†" the only point in which any compariſon with the caſe in diſpute will hold good, you totally diſregard: for

* Teſt Act. The *principle* of this act militates againſt every idea of *Morality*, and the very *nature* of *things*. The *crime* is made to conſiſt in NOT committing one; for it ſeems impoſſible to imagine that *any* man *can* qualify as the act directs *without* incurring *guilt*.

† Mr. M. p. 15.

the queſtion is, not whether *they* have a right to the privileges of a particular Society, of which they are *not* members, and to which they do *not* belong; but, Whether *any* of the members of the SAME community, and fulfilling *every civil* condition attached to their ſituation, *ought* to be excluded from the *common rights* of *all good citizens?* You have farther confounded* an excluſion from office by a *poſitive law*, with that ſort of *preference* which is always due to *ſuperior worth* and *talents*. But is there, in reality, *no difference?* If you have "*no law* which renders "*any* of your members *ineligible* to the office of "Secretary," moſt certainly every individual is "*equally*" at *liberty* to become a *candidate* for the office, though every one may not be equally *qualified* for the proper diſcharge of it's duties.

One reaſon with you why the Diſſenters ſhould be *ſatisfied* with their *preſent ſituation* in the ſtate is, becauſe "the Houſe of Commons, honourable as it "now is, *waited long* before it was *acknowledged* to "be a *neceſſary* branch of the Britiſh government†." And I think I may venture to add, Sir, that "he "who conſults our beſt hiſtorians, or the Statutes at "Large," will ſee that "the Houſe of Commons" *never would* have been "*acknowledged* a *neceſſary*

* Mr. M. p. 16. † Mr. M. p. 18.

"branch

" branch of the Britiſh government," if they had not, by *frequent repeated ſtruggles* for their privileges, *made themſelves ſo**. If they had contentedly "*waited*" for ſuch an acknowledgment from *any* of our princes, I am too much of an infidel to belive it *ever* would have happened. Let the Diſſenters, then, advert to the Hiſtory of the Houſe of Commons; and, if they would profit by it, they muſt *perſevere* in their application: they muſt not think of "*waiting*" till they are "*acknowledged* to be a *neceſſary branch* of "the Britiſh" Empire: but the Legiſlature *muſt* be "affronted with *renewed* appeals;" and what has happened to *that*, will happen to *them*; they will become an "HONOURABLE," as well as "a neceſſary "branch of the" Community. Under this article, alſo, you confound "*Acts* of Parliament" with it's "*rules* and *cuſtoms*;" and the *delegated* character of a

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* "People talk about the framing of our conſtitution, as "if all our anceſtors met in one large plain at one time; "and all *cool*, *deliberate*, and *diſintereſted*, formed the preſent "ſyſtem of government. Others, again, talk as if all our "immunities proceeded from the *condeſcenſion* and *benevo-* "*lence* of our *princes*. Both ſorts diſcover *groſs ignorance*. "Our conſtitution, like our language, is a fineneſs *produced* "*by the friction of contending intereſts*; and we ought to "aſcribe the delicacy and elegance of it to Providence "working by time, and a courſe of events." Mr. Robinſon's Political Catechiſm, p. 39.

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Repreſentative of the people with a "*Legiſlator*" in his *own right**. Nobody diſputes but that Parliament *ſhould* be the *ſole judge* of the propriety of it's own *rules* and *cuſtoms*; but it does not follow from this, that *Acts* of Parliament are not open to *public examination* and *complaint:* this would aim directly *againſt* "the repeal of all Penal Statutes in matters "of religion," which, you admit, "we may aſk "with honour." Inſtead of "ſuppoſing that *Acts* "of *Parliament* will be repealed on any *lower* prin-"ciple" than what governs "Corporations and "other ſocieties," we rather imagine they ought to be directed by *higher* and *nobler* motives, inaſmuch as the objects which they commonly include are *more important* and *more extenſive*. The *general good*, and the *preſervation* of the *general rights*, are the points to which Legiſlators ſhould ultimately look.

Nothing is ſo ill calculated to ſupport the uſurpations of *Tyranny* and *Perſecution* as the Chriſtian Religion; and yet, ſtrange as it may ſeem, ſcarcely any thing is more frequently brought to *countenance* their unjuſt pretenſions. The Religion of Chriſt, it is true, is an inexhauſtible ſource of Conſolation, under all circumſtances, and in every poſſible ſituation; but it is no leſs true, that it does *not forbid* to it's Diſci-

* Mr. M. p. 17.

ples,

ples any *rational attempts* to *improve* either the one or the other. I am led to theſe remarks from the manner in which our UNDERSTANDINGS are *inſulted* when you remind us, that "in all our *perplexities* "we may derive advantage from piety, *patience*, and "prudence:" that we ſhould "adopt thoſe *manners* "that excite good will, and be *content with thoſe ar-* "*guments* which operate by conviction. And though "*this mode* of obtaining relief is not pleaſing to the "*impatient*, it is eſſential to a real cure of their com- "plaints*." Doubtleſs, *patience* and *humility* are Leſſons of admirable *convenience*: they ſometimes *conceal* the moſt *dangerous maxims* of civil policy, and are frequently taught, to cover the moſt *deſperate deſigns* on Public Liberty; and it muſt alſo be acknowledged that, in the preſent inſtance, they come with *peculiar grace*. The "*piety, patience, prudence, man-* "*ners*, and *good will*," of Mr. Martin, are very conſpicuous! and the avowed *oppoſition* which he makes to the juſt claims of ſo *decided* a *majority* of his brethren, is a ſtrong proof that *he* is "content with thoſe "arguments which operate by conviction!"

In one word, Sir, your Speech betrays a degree of *Selfiſhneſs*, *Pride*, and *Ingratitude*, very inconſiſtent with the character of a *Diſſenting* Miniſter; and quite incompatible with the *benevolent ſpirit* of Religion.

* Mr. M. p. 11.

"WE,

"WE, as miniſters, are *already exempted* from offices of "burden; nor can we wiſh to be employed in civil "buſineſs. If our brethren, who are *not in the mini-* "*ſtry*, have ſet their affections on theſe things, and are "*perſuaded* they have a right to enjoy ſuch diſtinctions, "are they not *competent* to urge their *own claim?* If "they are every way qualified for thoſe ſtations, in "which they wiſh to move; in proportion to the fact, "ſo is the argument of their being competent to *plead* "their *own cauſe.* It ſeems as *ſtrange* they ſhould in- "vite Us to interfere, as it is *affecting* to behold with "what *eagerneſs* the invitation is accepted*." Thus, like the *Jewiſh Prieſt* in the Goſpel, you behold your brethren *wounded* in their civil rights, *deprived* by the arm of power of their civil privileges, and are content to "*paſs by on the* OTHER SIDE."

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

SOUTHWARK,
MARCH 30, 1790.

No Reverend DISSENTER.

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* Mr. M. p. 19.